

SURGE RELIEF VALVE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates to a surge relief valve in a safety relief system for a pressure vessel, more particularly to an improved surge relief valve for use in liquid product pipelines, and, even more particularly, to a surge relief valve having a dome gas-filled reservoir arranged to bias the main valve closed until a set relief pressure is sensed, and then to open to relieve the overpressure, and finally to force the main valve to close when the overpressure has dissipated. The present invention is an improvement over the invention disclosed and claimed in United States Patent No. 5,842,501, issued December 1, 1998, and incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Heretofore, pilot operated safety relief valves have been provided in pressure relief systems. Examples of prior art pilot operated relief valves are disclosed in United States Patent Nos. 4,848,397 dated July 18, 1989, and 5,842,501, dated December 1, 1998. While these types of relief valves have proven effective in applications where the fluid product is a gas, they are not suitable for use in some liquid applications, e.g., oil supply lines.

[0003] Liquid product pipelines must be protected from liquid surge, typically caused by pump failure, rapid block valve closing, non-return check valve hard shutting, emergency shut down of a tank or loading system, or even a pump coming on or tripping. The magnitude of surge pressures vary - some are virtually undetectable, while others are severe enough to cause major damage. These propagating waves, either increasing or decreasing rapidly, are commonly known as hydraulic transient surges or water hammers that can cause severe damage to liquid product pipelines, vessels, flanges, valving, and associated equipment. Pilot operated safety relief valves don't operate quickly enough to open and relieve the pressure.

[0004] What is needed, then, is a surge relief valve in a pressure relief system for a pressure vessel, more particularly an improved surge relief valve for use in liquid product pipelines, and, even more particularly, a surge relief valve having a dome gas-filled reservoir arranged to bias the main valve closed until a set relief pressure is sensed,

and then to open to relieve the overpressure, and finally to force the main valve to close when the overpressure has dissipated.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] The present invention broadly comprises a surge relief valve comprising a main valve body having a dome port and an inlet port. The inlet port is in fluid communication with a first fluid. The invention also comprises a dome reservoir connected to the main valve body via the dome port and arranged to hold a second fluid, a piston located in the main valve body, the piston in fluid communication with the reservoir, wherein the first fluid exerts an upward force on the piston, the second fluid exerts a downward force on the piston, and the piston is arranged to move in response to a differential in the upward and downward forces, wherein the first and second fluids are isolated from one another.

[0006] It is a general object of this invention to provide a surge relief valve assembly for rapid relief of excess pressure in liquid systems, whereby main valve set pressure and closing pressure are established solely by a fixed pressure of a suitable gas present in the dome region of the main valve, and whereby system relief can commence at the instant that system fluid pressure acting on the main seat area results in a force on the main piston greater than the opposing force exerted by dome gas pressure at the top of the piston.

[0007] Another object of this invention is to provide a surge relief valve assembly with a dome gas reservoir permanently attached to the top cover plate (cap), whereby existing dome gas present when the main valve first starts to open can further be compressed in a controlled manner as the main valve piston opens, so as to regulate the piston stroke and ultimately force closed the piston when the process liquid overpressure condition abates.

[0008] It is a further object of this invention to provide a surge relief valve that uses a main valve body in which the inlet passage is axially aligned with the main closure member (piston and seat), and where the outlet passage is aligned at ninety degrees to the inlet passage.

[0009] A further object of the invention is to dampen main valve piston movements, particularly upon closing, and eliminate or reduce the incidence of piston

oscillations within the surge relief valve through the use of a nonmetallic wedge ring that bears on the piston liner with pressure-induced frictional forces.

[0010] Other objects, features, and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the drawings, specification and claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a side elevational view of the surge relief valve assembly of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a top plan view of the surge relief valve shown in Figure 1;

Figure 3 is an enlarged sectional view of the surge relief valve shown in Figures 1 and 2, for illustrating the main relief valve in normal operating condition with the surge relief valve member in a closed position blocking flow from the pressure vessel;

Figure 4 shows the surge relief valve assembly of Figure 3 in a closed position; and,

Figure 5 shows the surge relief valve assembly of Figure 3 in an open position.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0011] In the description that follows, the terms "upwardly" and "downwardly" are relative, and refer to the perspective on a viewer facing the invention illustrated in Figures 1 and 3. Referring now to the drawing for a better understanding of this invention, and more particularly to the embodiment shown in Figures 1-3, a surge relief valve assembly **14** is illustrated in a pressure relief system, including a pipeline, vessel, or tank having an inlet generally indicated at **10** with a flange **12** thereon. The surge relief valve assembly has a lower flange **16** connected to upper system flange **12** by suitable bolt and nut combinations shown at **18**. The main body **20** of the assembly has an inlet **22** and outlet **24**. A threaded port normally used with other applications of this main valve body generally contains plug **118F**. Outlet **24** has a flange **26** that can be connected to an outlet flange **28** and pipe **30** in a similar fashion as inlet flange **16**. Fluids flow through the valve from inlet area **51** to outlet areas **52** and **54** once the piston **60** is forced by pressure in an upward direction away from nozzle surface **64**. Areas **52** and **54** are contiguous, with **52** having a generally annular shape around the circumference of piston **60** and liner **58**.

[0012] Although the claims of the present invention are not intended to be limited to any certain dimensions, in a preferred embodiment, the flanged valve sizes can be 1 x 2; 1-1/2 x 3; 2 x 3; 3 x 4; 4 x 6; 6 x 8; 8 x 10; or 12 x 16 (all dimensions in inches), for example. In addition to these nominal sizes, the flanged inlet connection **16**, **12**, and **18**, and flanged outlet **26** can be replaced by American National Standard Taper Pipe Threads (NPT) by using a main valve body **20** with an alternate machining configuration at inlet **22** and outlet **24**. Such NPT connections do not require bolting **18**, but rather screw together tightly with the use of wrenches, and are made leak-tight through the use of an appropriate sealing compound applied to the threads.

[0013] At the top of main valve body **20**, bolts **34** having an appropriate material specification for pressure-containing service, secure cap **32**. The tightened cap holds cylindrical liner **58** in position within the matching bore **56** that is machined into body **20**. Elastomeric O-rings **309** provide leak-tight seals between the interfacing metallic surfaces of body **20**, liner **58**, and cap **32**. Within the bore of liner **58** lies piston **60**, which slides freely up and down between nozzle surface **64** and the underside of cap **32**. To prevent metal-to-metal contact and possible scoring between piston **60** and liner **58**, wedge ring **312** and wear ring **313** are fit into shallow grooves in the piston that allow the outboard surface of each ring, and not the outside surface of the piston, to slide against the liner bore as the piston moves up and down. Items **312** and **313** are made of graphite-filled PTFE (polytetrafluoroethylene).

[0014] Attached to the top of cap **32**, generally by a suitable welding process, is dome reservoir **301**. This dome reservoir provides a dome volume **70X** that is supplemental to dome region **70** contained within the main valve body and cap envelope. The internal volume of reservoir **301** will vary depending on the nominal size of assembly **14**. Fluid transfer between dome volumes **70** and **70X** is made possible by port **302** in main valve cap **32**. Parts of dome reservoir **301** are fabricated from piping components or other suitable parts of a sufficient thickness to withstand the design pressure of the reservoir. Parts of the reservoir assembly are generally assembled using an appropriate welding process, with typical final welds shown as **301A**.

[0015] Piston seal **310**, an elastomeric O-ring, provides the pressure- and leak-tight seal between piston **60** and liner **58**. A PTFE back-up ring **311** is designed to give

the O-ring support and prevent excessive deflection of the O-ring into the gap between metal parts **58** and **60**.

[0016] In addition to its sliding surface contact with the bore of liner **58**, wedge ring **312** also provides a dampening function to help ensure smooth piston movement. As pressurized fluid in dome region **70** exerts a downward force on piston seal **310** and back-up ring **311**, items **310** and **311** in turn exert this downward force on wedge ring **312**. The generally triangular cross-section of the wedge ring and its matching recess within piston **60** causes an increased frictional force of the ring against the bore of liner **58** during piston travel. This increased friction induces drag on the movement of the piston and reduces the likelihood of rapid piston movements or oscillations.

[0017] At the bottom of piston **60** as shown, the main elastomeric O-ring seat **62** is secured in place by retaining plate **61**. The latter plate is held in place by bolt **61A**, which is tightened into a threaded hole in the piston. A locking thread insert **61B** within the threaded hole in piston **60** provides resistance to vibration and loosening torque in order to keep bolt **61A** secure and tight. Leak-tight closure of piston **60** is provided by the interference fit (squeeze) between seat **62** and metallic nozzle surface **64**, the latter having a raised portion to directly impinge on the seat. Nozzle **64** is composed of stainless steel, either through application of a corrosion-resistant weld overlay to the surface of the casting, if the casting is made of carbon steel, or by virtue of it having been machined directly into the casting material if a stainless steel casting is used.

[0018] Main valve body **20** has an outer planar mounting face **76** through which dome port **72** extends. Port **74** may also exist in the body, if machining has already been performed to prepare body **20** for use in a pilot-operated pressure relief valve application. If this is the case, plug weld **74A** will be added by an appropriate manual welding process to render port **74** inoperative. In order to allow the appropriate fluid to be routed into dome region **70** from dome port **72**, the top of liner **58** is machined with an annular space **66** and series of small radial ports **68**.

[0019] The outer portion of dome port **72**, on the left in Figure 3 as shown, is machined with an appropriate thread, such as NPT, to allow connection of an appropriate dome gas supply, control components, and fittings. A typical dome gas supply configuration is shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3 as follows: precision gas regulator **321**,

manual valves **322**, pressure gage **323**, threaded cross **324**, male hex nipple **325**, tubing **326**, roughing regulator **327**, manual block valve **328**, and gas storage cylinder **329**. Gas regulator **321** may be located by the end user of the surge relief assembly according to their configuration of gas supply tanks or other gas source. Gas supply will generally be provided by the end user.

[0020] In some aspects (not shown), reservoir **301** is separate from cap **32**. In these aspects, port **302** is configured to accept one end of a piping arrangement and reservoir **301** is provided with a port to accept the other end of the piping arrangement and the piping arrangement provides fluid communication between volumes **70** and **70X**. The piping arrangement can be of any type known in the art, as configured for the parameters of the pressure relief system.

OPERATION

[0021] A set, or trigger, pressure is specified by the user of the surge relief valve assembly according to the operational parameters of their pipeline system, vessel, or tank. The value chosen corresponds to the point at which excess system pressure must be relieved, and is frequently the maximum allowable working pressure as defined by the governing piping or vessel design code.

[0022] Figure 4 shows the surge relief valve assembly of Figure 3 in a closed position. Figure 5 shows the surge relief valve assembly of Figure 3 in an open position. The set pressure of the surge relief valve assembly is set and maintained by charging dome volumes **70** and **70X** with a predetermined pressure of a gas such as nitrogen or air. With the main valve closed, as shown in Figure 4, the dome gas is trapped within a fixed leak-tight volume. At all times, dome gas is completely separate and independent from the process fluid present at the valve inlet **51**. Depending on the specific operating environment, temperature compensation may be necessary to maintain constant dome pressure, as pressures of fixed gas volumes rise with increasing temperature and fall with decreasing temperatures. In some aspects, a self-relieving type of regulator **321** is used for temperature compensation. Regulator **321** bleeds off any pressure increase that develops in dome regions **70** and **70X** due to increased ambient temperature. In some aspects, temperature compensation involves the use of a buried tank or plenum which, by

virtue of its isolation underground, will not be susceptible to internal pressure increases as a result of ambient temperature variations.

[0023] The value of dome gas pressure that corresponds to a specified set pressure is a function of the ratio of main valve seat or nozzle area to piston seal area for the valve size in question. Each surge relief valve size has a characteristic area ratio, which can be calculated directly from the machining dimensions of nozzle **64** and liner **58**. For example, in a 3" by 4" main valve with a nozzle diameter of 3.05 inches and liner inside diameter of 3.50 inches, the seat-to-seal area ratio equals 0.76; for a specified valve set pressure of 500 pounds per square inch (psi), the corresponding dome gas pressure would equal $(0.76) \times (500)$ or 380 psi. Establishment of correct dome pressure will, as set pressure is reached, result in zero net force acting on the piston when considering the dome gas acting downward on the piston and system fluid acting in an upward direction.

[0024] In Figure 4, the force generated by the dome gas, hereafter referred to as the dome force, on piston **60** is greater than the force generated by the process fluid, hereafter referred to as the process force, on retaining plate **61**. For example, the dome force is proportional to the pressure of the process fluid on retaining plate **61** and the area of retaining plate **61**. Thus, piston **60** is pushed downward, toward inlet **51** and seat **62** seals against nozzle **64**. As the process fluid pressure reaches and then slightly exceeds the set pressure, the piston **60** is moved in an upward direction, away from said inlet, moving seat **62** off of nozzle **64**, as shown in Figure 5. As seat **62** moves, the process fluid begins to flow up through inlet passage **51** to outlet **54**, reducing the pressure of the process fluid and relieving excess system pressure. Piston travel is allowed to begin essentially instantaneously, dependent solely on the balance of the forces exerted by the dome gas and the process fluid on the piston at any instant. That is, piston travel, and hence fluid communication, or fluid flow, between the inlet passage **51** and outlet passage **54**, is responsive to the differential between the dome force and the process force. The fluid communication between the inlet passage **51** and outlet passage **54** is proportional to the differential between the dome force and the process force and can change incrementally in response to incremental changes in the force differential.

[0025] As shown in Figure 5, piston **60** continues its travel upward as the force generated by the process fluid on retaining plate **61** continues to rise. As piston **60** moves upward, the volume encompassed by regions **70** and **70X** decreases. Consequently, the dome gas is compressed to a higher pressure. The internal volume for dome reservoir **301** is selected so that the allowable rise in dome gas pressure from a closed main piston **60** (Figure 4) to fully open piston (Figure 5) is generally 5 to 7%, but may vary depending on specific applications. The selection of the internal volume for dome reservoir **301** is determined through a combination of calculations to determine inlet **51** size required for process fluid flow and actual test data on prototype valve assemblies.

[0026] As the process force abates, the compressed dome gas forces piston **60** downward. When the dome force is equal to the process force, piston **60** closes and seat **62** seals tightly against nozzle **64**.

[0027] Thus, it is seen that the objects of the invention are efficiently obtained. While a preferred embodiment of the present invention has been illustrated in detail, modifications and adaptations of the preferred embodiment may be readily apparent to those having ordinary skill in the art. It is to be understood that such modifications and adaptations are considered to be within the scope and spirit of the present invention as set forth in the following claims.